

# Executive Summary

Sarah Middleton-Lee,  
Independent Consultant

# STRATEGIC REVIEW

The Global Network  
of People Living with HIV

September 2010



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Introduction

In June-August 2010, the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) undertook a comprehensive Strategic Review – to inform a new Strategic Plan for 2011-15 and guide the organisation within the changing environment for HIV and global health. The Review was approved by the International Board of GNP+, managed by a Strategic Review Working Group and implemented by an independent consultant. It focused on three areas – the role, work and governance of GNP+ – and explored key questions (such as how GNP+ could make a more effective contribution to the global response to HIV). The Review looked backwards (reflecting on GNP+'s strengths and weaknesses in 2006-10) and forwards (identifying strategic issues and options for the future). Its remit was the competencies and strategies of the International Secretariat of GNP+ (not the wider PLHIV movement or regional networks, nor serving as an evaluation of GNP+'s programmatic and advocacy work). The Review engaged over 1,160 stakeholders through five methods:

- 1. Global e-survey among PLHIV** in English, Chinese, French, Spanish and Russian, with 662 surveys completed and up to 995 responses to some questions from over 129 countries.
- 2. Focus group discussions** involving 121 participants from over 50 countries through: 4 discussions with stakeholder groups (GNP+ Board, GNP+ staff, World AIDS Campaign (WAC) staff and GNP+ national programme partners); and 6 with constituents of regional and sub-regional PLHIV networks (in Asia Pacific, Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America and East Europe and Central Asia).
- 3. In-depth interviews** with 38 representatives of institutions (of PLHIV organizations, donors, multilateral agencies, etc) and 11 key informants (leaders within the HIV and PLHIV movements).
- 4. Short questionnaire among GNP+ programme partners**, with 4 responses received.
- 5. Literature review** of over 20 GNP+ strategies, plans, proposals and reports relating to 2006-10.

The Strategic Review was complemented by two further processes to address the future role of GNP+: Needs Assessment of Regional PLHIV Networks; and GNP+ Environment Mapping of key civil society actors.

The Consultant thanks all of the participants in the Review and confirms that all inputs were used in the preparation of this Executive Summary and Report that, as syntheses, focus on the key issues highlighted.

## Context to GNP+ Strategic Review

The Review took place at a critical time for the response to HIV and for GNP+. The global environment is changing, characterized by: a pandemic with 33.4 million PLHIV; 2010 targets for Universal Access unmet; changing architecture; economic crisis; 're-medicalisation' of HIV; move towards wider responses to health and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and increased attention to human rights. Meanwhile, GNP+ has undergone rapid growth; faces critical challenge as an HIV network; and functions in a crowded civil society arena, with increasing efforts to consolidate.

### SNAPSHOT OF GNP+ ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2006-10

Since 2006, GNP+ has: developed a new model of evidence collection; increased involvement with regional PLHIV networks and individual PLHIV; improved access to technical expertise from global partners; and formed better structural relationships with other networks and civil society partners. This new way of working has proven successful in: supporting global, regional and national structures; developing and sustaining networking functions that cannot be otherwise funded; ensuring structural mechanisms to document the voices and experiences of PLHIV; and ensuring that PLHIV messaging in advocacy results in positive change at global, regional and national levels.

Examples of specific results include:

- Increasing GNP+'s income by 458% during 2005-09.
- Increasing GNP+'s sub-contractors/grantees to over 90, mostly national PLHIV networks, by 2009.
- Scaling up evidence-gathering tools, such as the Criminalisation Scan (applied in over 200 countries).
- Influencing global policy making bodies, such as WHO (on ART guidelines) and UNAIDS (on Positive Health, Dignity and Prevention).





## Findings of the GNP+ Strategic Review

### AREA 1: THE ROLE OF GNP+:

The Review identified that, while applauding the vision cited in GNP+'s Strategic Plan 2006-10 ("*facilitating leadership and the voices of PLWHAs*"), respondents had mixed views on its performance. In the online survey, over half of PLHIV respondents – who had stated that they know GNP+ at least a little – said it facilitates PLHIV voices 'quite well' or 'very well'. Others, particularly in interviews and focus groups, felt that it is paying too much attention to programmatic work, neglecting its primary role of global advocate. GNP+'s literature documents commitment to being constituency-driven, with significant efforts made to enhance communication and consultation. Yet many respondents – across stakeholder groups – perceive GNP+ as a Northern-based organisation led by gay men. GNP+ is acknowledged as the 'go to' organisation to bring PLHIV to the global table, but there is concern that representatives do not reflect the diversity of PLHIV. There is a sense of disconnect between PLHIV 'on the ground' and GNP+ internationally. Many constituents do not know what GNP+ does and/or how to get involved.


GNP+ describes itself as a network of networks, governed by six autonomous regional PLHIV networks. Yet many respondents described the 'broken' relationship between the Secretariat and regional networks. While some of the networks see the Secretariat as disrespectful and unsupportive (including in times of crisis), some staff see some of the networks as uncommunicative and unaccountable to their constituents. The Needs Assessment confirmed significant needs among some regional networks, including for core funding and capacity building in strategic planning, financial management and outreach to constituents. There is an urgent need to rebuild all links in GNP+'s global-regional-national chain of communication/collaboration.

GNP+ is credited with strong positioning within the civil society response to HIV, but encouraged to collaborate more systematically, maximizing complementarities with others while ensuring its unique role. It is also seen as having developed an important relationship with key normative and policy institutions, such as WHO. Meanwhile, the Secretariat is widely praised for achieving a 'phoenix from the ashes' transformation of GNP+ since 2006 – gaining financial stability and impressive growth in programmes and staff. Key aspects of this transformation have included: professionalization of the organisation's systems and processes; strategic packaging of activities that appeal to donors; and identification of a strong technical niche (evidence-based advocacy for PLHIV).

For the future, almost all respondents (91.5% in the online survey) said that a global network of PLHIV is still needed and that its primary role should be as a global advocate and voice for PLHIV. Some people called for a more planned approach to building PLHIV leadership and more diverse representation of GNP+. Such steps would be critical to GNP+ moving beyond a network-of-network model and re-mobilising as a more modern and innovative global 'forum' or 'alliance', with a constituency of PLHIV organisations and networks working at national, regional and global levels. The Secretariat would need leadership with the vision to push through such a change and its implications. It would also be critical for the Secretariat to (re)build relations with the regional PLHIV networks and, in turn, for them to rebuild relations with their national constituents. The Secretariat should *facilitate* support to improve the regional networks' functioning, accountability and crisis resolution. Mean-

while, especially through the interviews with institutional representatives, GNP+ was encouraged to continue positioning itself strongly among global stakeholders, particularly civil society – exploring more systematic collaborations, even mergers, with key ‘peers’, such as the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW) and International Treatment Preparedness Campaign (ITPC).

## AREA 2: THE WORK OF GNP+:




Respondents gave very positive feedback on the ‘evidence informed advocacy’ approach of GNP+ that has re-established its technical reputation and legitimacy to do advocacy. The tools (Criminalisation Scan, Stigma Index, etc), combined with technical and financial support to national PLHIV networks, are seen a good ‘model of change’ to gather evidence, build capacity, influence policy, etc. There are some concerns, including delays in extracting advocacy messages and perceptions by some (including some regional PLHIV networks) of the tools being too academic. Some respondents questioned the process and transparency of the selection of countries/partners and the sustainability of the work in countries.

As seen in its literature, GNP+ has also undertaken extensive planned and reactive advocacy work, from direct lobbying to technical consultations. Examples were cited of policy changes achieved (such as the text of WHO guidelines on ART) and agendas set (such as Positive Health, Dignity and Prevention). While welcoming individual achievements, there was a call for such work to have a strong strategy, with a focus on key global policy change processes (such as the civil society delegations to UNAIDS and the Global Fund).

A strong message from the Review was of imbalance between national programmes and global advocacy. The former are seen as a vital source of income and evidence. But, while a small minority said that GNP+ should not do *any* programmatic work, many – including national PLHIV network partners – called for GNP+ to re-prioritise advocacy and re-articulate programmes as a means to support it. Meanwhile, there were mixed feelings about PLHIV involvement in GNP+’s work. Over half of the PLHIV in the online survey rated involvement as ‘quite well’ or ‘very well’. E-surveys and PLHIV summits, such as Living 2008, were cited as important opportunities for consultation, while GNP+’s coordination role in the International AIDS Conferences was seen as strategically important for PLHIV. Overall, respondents praised extensive use of partnerships – from the Leadership through Accountability Programme (with WAC) to the SRHR package (with EngenderHealth, ICW, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), WHO and Young Positives).

Respondents enthusiastically welcomed GNP+’s focus on human rights – a portfolio of issues viewed as highly relevant and appropriate. But many emphatically criticized neglect of treatment and low engagement in the wider health/financing agenda – areas within which GNP+ could identify a key, complementary role.

For the future, GNP was urged to prioritise global advocacy, informed by the evidence of its programmes. It was strongly encouraged to better communicate its results – to enable constituents and stakeholders to understand the real (rather than perceived) scale and quality of its results. For programmes, some respondents asked GNP+ to more clearly define its ‘road-map’, with particular attention to how it starts and ends its involvement (with exit strategies continuing to facilitate support and sustain the roll out of its work). It should also speed up



the process of identifying advocacy messages and ensure transparent approaches to country/partner selection. As for advocacy, GNP+ was encouraged to 'work smart' – having a defined strategy focused on the key bodies and processes for global policy change. Meanwhile, as in Area 1, GNP+ was encouraged to continue to scale up and be creative in its consultation with and involvement of PLHIV. Hundreds of suggestions, from blogs to information platforms, were made by the PLHIV answering the online survey. Meanwhile, other respondents asked GNP+ to ensure that its partnerships have agreed deliverables and are institutionalized. Finally, while PLHIV would ideally like GNP+ to address a broad range of issues, priority is given to access to treatment and human rights, combined with a call to engage in the MDGs and global health/financing. There was a lack of consensus about the extent to which GNP+ should focus on such issues from the perspective of all PLHIV or key populations.

### AREA 3: THE GOVERNANCE OF GNP+:

Here, respondents welcomed that regional PLHIV networks have been at the heart of GNP+ governance. But there have been challenges in fulfilling that model, especially securing full participation across all regions. There are also concerns as to whether the Board provides appropriate support to the Secretariat, in terms of strategic inputs and rapid decision making. While the Renewal Process has improved understanding of some roles and responsibilities, areas are still unclear. Overall, it was acknowledged that GNP+ has benefitted from some highly committed Board members. But concerns were expressed about the transparency of selection process and some members' accountability to their constituents. There were also many questions about under-performance and the degree to which the Board offers the range of organizational, policy and programmatic skills, experience and influence needed. These challenges are exacerbated by unclear systems and tensions - between the Secretariat and GNP+ Board, with concerns on both sides about poor communication and lack of trust.

For the future, most respondents said that GNP+ should continue to *only* be governed by PLHIV. But many stressed that *all* members of the Board must demonstrate the right type and level of skills and experience.

The majority of respondents called for each of the regional PLHIV networks to retain a seat on the Board, with efforts to address full cross-regional participation and under-served areas (such as the Middle East and North Africa). They also, across all stakeholder groups, favoured adding other types of members, including representatives of constituencies (such as key populations), key 'peers' (such as ICW and ITPC) and areas of expertise (such as the law). There was a call for all members to be transparently selected or elected, building on the current Renewal Process, with agreed TORs, etc. In terms of structure, a minority of respondents called for GNP+ governance to remain as it is. But others argued for change – probably to a model combining a small executive committee and wider advisory group. Finally, it was stressed that the success of future governance is dependent on improved systems and relations between the Secretariat and Board.



## Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings across all three areas of the Strategic Review, the following **CONCLUSIONS** were drawn:

1. GNP+ is, by its very nature, something in which **MANY PEOPLE HAVE INVESTED A GREAT DEAL AND ABOUT WHICH MANY CARE DEEPLY**. The over 1,160 respondents to the Strategic Review (from diverse countries, cultures, sectors, etc) were keen to contribute to securing and strengthening the organisation's future.
2. That range of stakeholders has **A RANGE OF (SOMETIMES DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT) HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS** of an organisation that, despite impressive growth, remains modest in size and capacity. As with any global network, GNP+ 'cannot please all of the people all of the time'. However, it could better manage expectations and foster ownership by more clearly defining and articulating what it is, what it does and what people can and cannot expect from it.
3. GNP+ in 2010 is unrecognisable from 2006. It has achieved a **DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION** – from a nearly bankrupt organisation struggling to survive to one with financial stability, an increasingly professional approach and a growing technical reputation. The credit for this lies with many different individuals and organizations, but, in particular, the CEO and staff of GNP+.
4. GNP+ now implements a vast portfolio of work – supporting national PLHIV networks, building partnerships, developing evidence on areas identified as priorities by PLHIV, etc. But there risks being a growing tension between the **INCREASING PRAISE FROM EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AND AN INTERNAL SENSE OF DISCONNECT** (with many constituents feeling unengaged and unrepresented).
5. Some of this disconnect is fuelled by **CHALLENGING SYSTEMS AND DYNAMICS** within GNP+ that require urgent action. Examples include the relationships between the International Secretariat and regional PLHIV networks and between the CEO, Chair of the Board and Board as a whole. While continuing to professionalise as an organisation, such relationships require as much attention as issues of structure and function.
6. The disconnect is also fuelled by a gap between the **REALITY** of GNP+ (i.e. its documented work and results) and **PERCEPTIONS**. Despite significant efforts to enhance communication and consultation, many constituents and stakeholders remain unaware of the scale, range and quality of programmatic and advocacy results that the network is achieving.
7. The **GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT IS SHIFTING RAPIDLY AROUND PLHIV**, with an end to 'AIDS exceptionalism' within policy and funding arenas. Resources are scarcer and HIV-specific networks face pressure to down-size. Against this context, GNP+ faces a choice. It can continue business as usual and try to ride out the storm. Or it can, itself, shift – **FUNDAMENTALLY RE-VISITING THE TYPE OF ORGANIZATION IT IS** and what it means to be 'fit for purpose' for the next five years.
8. Strategic Planning for 2011-15 provides a **TIMELY OPPORTUNITY** to address many of the issues identified in the Strategic Review of GNP+. It also provides a further opportunity to listen to stakeholders, reach out to new/existing constituents and work together to re-ignite passion for the **MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT OF PLHIV IN THE RESPONSE TO HIV** and ensure that GNP+ is the global organisation to make that a reality.



Based on the finds and conclusions, the **RECOMMENDATIONS** are that GNP+:

1. Refocus, reenergize and reposition itself as **THE GLOBAL VOICE, ADVOCATE AND LEADER OF PLHIV**.
2. Develop a **STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2011-15 THAT CLEARLY DEFINES AND SUBSTANTIATES THAT PRIMARY ROLE**. Key components should include: defining/building an engaged constituency, including through further creative communication and consultation; developing a planned approach to building global leadership among PLHIV; and enhancing GNP+'s own leadership, including by expanding the diversity of its representation.
3. Move beyond the business as usual of a network-of-networks. Explore different models and re-orientate itself as a **MODERN TYPE OF GLOBAL ENTITY** – perhaps a ‘forum’ or ‘alliance’ - with a constituency base of **PLHIV ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS THAT WORK AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS**.
4. Support its role and model by **(RE)BUILDING STRONG RELATIONS BETWEEN THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT (I.E. THE GLOBAL BOARD AND STAFF) AND THE REGIONAL PLHIV NETWORKS** – in recognition of the importance of such relations to engaging constituencies and, in turn, ensuring the legitimacy of GNP+. Use the results of the Needs Assessment of Regional Networks to develop a collaborative approach to GNP+ *facilitating* (rather than *implementing*) the strengthening of the regions’ work and accountability and, in turn, their engagement in GNP+'s global efforts. Also, as appropriate, support crisis resolution.
5. Significantly **EXPAND GLOBAL ADVOCACY**, with programmatic work more clearly articulated to provide supporting evidence. In the Strategic Plan, focus on advocacy that specifically targets key policy change mechanisms within which GNP+ can bring added value and make a concrete difference.
6. Specifically, as a matter of urgency, reach out to PLHIV leaders in Africa to explore the most appropriate and practical mechanism to **ENGAGE THE AFRICAN PLHIV COMMUNITY** in the governance and work of GNP+.
7. Maintain a focus on a **HUMAN RIGHTS PORTFOLIO OF ISSUES**, but also passionately re-engage with **HIV TREATMENT** and more fully engage in the **GLOBAL HEALTH, MDG AND FINANCING FOR HEALTH/HIV AGENDA**. Define what these issues mean to GNP+ and where its niche lies (complementing the work of others).
8. Build on the Strategic Review to, within an **EVALUATION OF GNP+ PROGRAMMES**, address not only results and impact, but how the work is done. In particular, look at: the involvement of PLHIV; partnerships; ownership of tools; and a ‘road map’ of where GNP+ can best use its capacity and value added.
9. Remain **GOVERNED BY AND FOR PLHIV**, with only PLHIV having decision-making power. But, after the Strategic Plan has been developed, expand the range of PLHIV on the GNP+ Board – maintaining the regional PLHIV networks and **ADDING HIV POSITIVE MEMBERS FROM SPECIFIC CONSTITUENCIES** (such as key populations), **AREAS OF EXPERTISE** (such as law) and/or **STRATEGIC PARTNERS** (such as ICW and ITPC). Based on an audit of the skills and knowledge required to guide implementation of the Plan, ensure that all Board members are appropriately qualified and selected/elected through transparent processes.
10. After the Strategic Plan has been developed, **RE-STRUCTURE THE BOARD** to a model that will provide more effective decision-making for the organisation and support to the International Secretariat in the challenging years to come. Explore different types of models, such as those that combine some form of small and highly engaged management committee with a diverse and flexible advisory group.

11. Position itself more strategically within efforts (such as the Free Space Initiative) to ensure **COLLABORATION, CONSOLIDATION AND COST EFFICIENCY WITHIN THE GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE TO HIV**. In particular, clarify and strengthen relationships and complementarities with key peers (such as ICW and ITPC), including exploring the potential for more systematic collaboration and/or mergers.
12. Combine the above strategic actions with **URGENT ATTENTION TO INTER-PERSONAL DYNAMICS AND STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIPS** within GNP+. Continue the Renewal Process and professionalization of the organization, but also actively promote conflict resolution and team building.
13. Build on the Strategic Review and use the development of the next Strategic Plan as an opportunity to **CONTINUE TO LISTEN TO, CONSULT AND DEBATE** with GNP+ constituents and stakeholders, both 'friends and foes'. Use the final Plan to **RE-LAUNCH AND RE-MOBILISE**. Ensure that all key stakeholders, but particularly staff and Board, understand and support the plan and can act as ambassadors for GNP+ - leading far reaching corporate communications and a 'membership drive' to expand and engage the constituency.

Published by  
The Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+)  
P.O. BOX 11726  
1001 GS Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

Website: [www.gnpplus.net](http://www.gnpplus.net)  
E-mail: [infognp@gnpplus.net](mailto:infognp@gnpplus.net)

Some rights reserved: This document may be freely shared, copied, translated, and reviewed and distributed, in part or in whole, but not for sale or use in conjunction with commercial purposes.

Only authorised translation, adaptation and reprints may bear the emblem of GNP+. Other Enquiries should be addressed to GNP+, P.O.BOX 11726, 1001 GS, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, [infognp@gnpplus.net](mailto:infognp@gnpplus.net).

© September 2010. The Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+)  
Suggested citation: GNP+ (2010). Strategic Review of the Global Network of People living with HIV: Executive Summary. Amsterdam, GNP+.

Design: Raffaele Teo ([arteo71@hotmail.com](mailto:arteo71@hotmail.com))



